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Reciprocal Relations of Maternal Uncle and Nephew

604 The general attitude of the maternal uncle toward his nephew is one of giving; and that of the nephew, one of receiving.

428 604 183 431 Let us first deal with inheritance. Theoretically, the rule is that the maternal uncle must leave all of his property, both personal and in the form of cattle, to his oldest sister's eldest son. All his other nephews,—other sons of the same sister or sons of other sisters,—are left out of the inheritance. This is the rule. However, in practice it seldom works, as the maternal uncle during his life continues to transfer his property in the form of gifts to his own male children, so that at the time of his death there is nothing, or very little, left of his property to be inherited by his nephew, unless the uncle is a very rich man. Only among the wealthy class has the uncle always something left to bequeath to his nephew. For this he does not need a will as it falls within the proscribed rule mentioned above. The following cases are illustrative.

428 431 604 Ilaro is the eldest son of a man named Rafael living at Uribia, and, like his mother, belongs to the Arpushaina sib. Ilaro's mother is the elder of the two sisters of Calleja, who in turn is the eldest of five siblings,—two sisters and three brothers. Thus Ilaro, his mother, and his uncle Calleja are all seniors.

[556] Calleja is not looked upon as a rich man, although he is well fixed and belongs to the middle class. Ilaro, however, does not expect much, if any, inheritance from his uncle and is aware

[234] that the latter has been transferring most of his cattle,—the most valuable possession in Guajiro eyes,—in the form of gifts

[422] to his own sons. The writer visited Ilaro's uncle who lives nearby and saw the cattle already branded with his son's personal brand. Ilaro is not at all concerned about the property of his other uncles as their property will pass automatically to their own children.

This next case illustrates a different situation. Pacheco is a very rich man who lives in Carraipia. He has a nephew,—the senior maternal nephew,—who lives there also. Pacheco has a son of his own and the present writer observed that some of Pacheco's cattle have already been branded for his son, but

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604 Regarding the marriage of the senior nephew, the maternal
584 uncle plays no prescribed part, unless the prospective bride comes from a very wealthy family and consequently the bride price is quite high. In such cases the uncle is expected to help
(583) with a small donation to meet the price. Although this is expected from him he has no say whatsoever in the selection of the bride. The bride price in its entirety, or certainly in major part, is paid by the father of the bridegroom. The influence of the uncle, even if he has happened to help pay part of the bride price, is practically zero. This is the rule, but naturally in-
(583) dividual deviations from it are found. The case of Camilo is again illustrative of this. Although he is not contemplating marriage for the present, Camilo told the present writer that once he had made up his mind to get married he would go to his uncle for advice. No other such cases came to the attention of the writer, but speaking with other informants on this subject he was invariably told that such cases do often occur and that they are not out of the ordinary. However, this is not prescribed behavior and arises only from personal regard or affection.

604 There is a prescribed pattern of conduct that both the senior maternal uncle and his senior nephew must observe when in each other's company, regardless of what personal sentiments they have for each other. If there are other people around the nephew must always keep silence if his uncle is speaking and if the nephew wants to say something he must first ask permission of his uncle. This permission is asked by the nephew rising from his seat or, if he is already standing, by tapping his uncle on the arm. The uncle is at complete liberty to grant or refuse the permission; however, a refusal was never witnessed by the present writer. In all ways the nephew must show respect and conduct himself with propriety. If he, in any way, should fail
604 to conform, he would be severely criticized, not only by his
626 uncle but also by the rest of the company, whether they were relatives or not. On the other hand, the uncle must not laugh at his nephew,—although he may laugh with him,—and if his nephew says something wrong he must correct him in such a way that his nephew would not feel hurt. Should the uncle do otherwise he would be subjected to criticism, not by his nephew, but by the rest of the company.

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604 the niece the giver. Another difference is that while the giving-receiving relation in the uncle-nephew situation is between the senior nephew and his senior maternal uncle, in the uncle-niece situation it is between the senior maternal uncle and all the daughters of all his sisters.

In the senior maternal uncle-niece relationship the whole [928] question of inheritance is out of the picture, as in Goajiro culture the woman, regardless of her status, cannot inherit. The nieces never expect and never get anything from any of their uncles in the way of inheritance or otherwise. Consequently we can discuss economic expectations on the part of the nieces as a motivating factor. Their behavior toward their senior maternal uncle is the resultant of other factors. The senior maternal uncle being on his part the receiver of benefits may act from affection or regard, or from selfish or other motives, or combinations thereof.

604 The senior maternal uncle receives material profits from all 583 of his sisters' daughters through the bride price. The bride price, however big or small, must be paid to the senior maternal uncle of the bride, while he on the other hand does not contribute anything toward the dowry which the bride must present to the bridegroom. The bride price must always be paid in cattle, while the dowry usually consists of gifts of clothing, household goods, hammocks, etc. Consequently the senior maternal uncle is very much interested in the marriage of his nieces and sees that they marry advantageously. He may accept or reject [584] a prospective bridegroom at will, and the girl has to conform [193] and to say nothing in the matter. This is the theory and to a great extent the practice, although there are cases in which the uncle has given in on the insistence of the niece or of the prospective bridegroom or of both, and a few cases of elopement have also come to the notice of the present writer. As previously mentioned, all of this concerns only the senior maternal uncle and all the daughters of all his sisters: the other uncles, maternal or other, have no say in the matter.

604 The following cases will serve as illustrations. Estrella is 584 the daughter of Rasmuilo's oldest sister. They all belong to the wealthy class. She is now of marriageable age—about 18